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ABSTRACT

This report on urban education in New Jersey describes major problems and presents recommendations for solving them. The report is based on a telephone survey of members of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) from 29 school districts identified as urban aid districts, and the recommendations were generated at roundtable discussions and two public hearings. First, the general characteristics of urban districts are discussed. The remainder of the report is divided into segments based on these key issues: school finance; inadequate facilities; class size; early childhood education; improving students' academic skills; increasing success on standardized tests; student absenteeism; counseling and support services; inadequate number of substitutes; the partnership of school staff and parents; school staff/administrative training; making sure schools work; and political interference (educational decision-making secondary to political decision-making). The basic finding reported is that New Jersey urban districts are plagued by pervasive poverty, inadequate funding, local and State administrative inefficiency, socioeconomic isolation, and racial segregation. The recommended solutions to these problems call for action from the State government, the NJEA, local administrators, local districts and administrators, colleges, parents, communities, and school staff. (KH)

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THE URBAN CHALLENGE

A JOINT NJEA/NEA PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

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THE URBAN CHALLENGE

A JOINT NJEA/NEA PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

This country has been deluged with recommendations, legislative initiatives, and private sector programs to improve education in the public schools during the past several years. Many positive changes have emerged as a result of the awareness that education must be the country's top priority.

Unfortunately, few reforms have reflected the needs of urban area schools and the children who attend them. In recent years, those schools have been criticized, stigmatized, scrutinized, and politicized, while their students have been denied educational resources and programs which others across the state take for granted.

While the State of New Jersey has made an effort to repair some of the damage, it has failed to develop a comprehensive and systematic approach to finding solutions to the problems facing urban schools. For the most part, the State has not taken advantage of perhaps the greatest resource in identifying the needs of urban schools—the public school employees working within them.

In December 1986, NJEA—assisted by the National Education Association—became involved in one of the most massive projects in its history. Called the NJEA/NEA Urban Challenge, the program has been based on the belief that the people who work in schools are the best resource for identifying problems and formulating solutions. The project also sought ideas from those who have studied urban education, as well as those who live in urban communities.

SURVEY OF SCHOOL STAFF

The first step involved a telephone survey conducted in December 1986. Surveyed were 412 randomly selected NJEA members from 29 of the 56 school districts identified as urban aid districts by the State Department of Education and the Department of Community Affairs. To provide comparisons, the survey also included 316 randomly selected members from nonurban districts.

Questions covered a variety of topics, including:

- the most serious problem school employees experience in their jobs.
- the factors which make their school district a good place to work.
- job satisfaction.
- adequacy of resources and programs.
- factors which make the school district a good place for children to learn.
- factors which prevent student learning.
- whether or not due recognition is given to students and teachers.
- percentage of students with basic skills deficiencies.
- problems in the schools. and
- suggestions for improvement.

Large percentages of urban school staff members cited the following as some of the top problems:

- large class size.
- not enough classrooms or classroom space.
- lack of programs for gifted and talented students and programs for special needs students.
- no reasonable limit on the number of students with special needs placed in regular classrooms.
- lack of support by parents for teachers' efforts. and
- lack of computers for student use.
- inadequate numbers of special services personnel and guidance counselors.

The school staffs also reported large numbers of students have problem home environments, lack basic skills, fail standardized tests, are absent, repeat more than one grade, and lack proper nutrition. Urban junior/middle and high school staff also listed teen pregnancy, the student dropout rate, and student drug and alcohol abuse as major problems.

MEMBERS SPEAK OUT AT ROUNDTABLES

The concerns raised in the survey surfaced again in "roundtable" sessions with NJEA members in 17 urban districts around the state.

Held from January to March, the meetings were conducted by NJEA officers, representatives of the Association's Urban Education Committee, and NJEA staff.

Roundtable participants graphically depicted the daily problems confronting urban schools and urban students.

They spoke of overcrowded classrooms, deteriorated buildings, classes filled with students who required special academic and emotional help, insufficient and poor quality materials and equipment, and outdated and insufficient numbers of textbooks.

They shared stories of districts fraught with politics, inconsistencies in the way individual schools operate, and inconsistencies in the way districts respond to schools, staff, and students.

They spoke of the needs for earlier schooling for students in urban areas, for greater curricula and textbook coordination among schools and classes, and for elimination of social promotion.

They called for ways to overcome lack of parental education, parental fear of schools, parental apathy, and family mobility.

The lack of money—not student, academic, or staff needs—dictates the educational program, they observed.

HEARINGS BRING IN MORE EXPERTS, IDEAS

To wrap up the Urban Challenge information-gathering process, the Association conducted two public hearings in March.

Held in Camden's Pyne Poynt Middle School and Jersey City's James J. Ferris High School, the hearings drew a broad spectrum of speakers. They included state and national urban education leaders, teachers and other school staff, administrators, researchers, local and state lawmakers, school board members, and parents who related their experiences, studies and recommendations.

Testimony ranged from the daily traumas which urban school students and staff must face, to detailed fiscal data affecting urban education. The common thread that ran through most of the testimony was: Urban schools need more money.

In addition, speakers introduced a variety of other ideas to overcome the problems which schools in urban areas, their students, and their staffs face.

"The educational wings of urban children should not—and cannot—be affected by whether they are rich or poor, whether they are black or white, whether they are urban or suburban. If we are to make an effectual change in education, as school board members, as teachers and as colleagues towards better education, we must work together."

Ms. Aletha R. Wright
Camden School Board President

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN DISTRICTS

As one local association president from an urban district observed, "Idealistically, we should not even be here talking about problems in urban education. If anything, it should be problems in U.S. education, because there should not be any more problems in urban education than there are in suburban education."

But pervasive poverty, inadequate funding, local and state administrative inefficiency, socio-economic isolation, and racial segregation are common problems in New Jersey's urban school districts.

The tax base from which our largest urban districts can get local funding for schools is only 28% of that available to districts statewide. Consequently, while the statewide equalized property valuation per pupil is $213,934, the equalized property valuation in New Jersey's six largest urban areas is only $60,760 per pupil.

Yet, urban residents tax themselves up to the limit of their ability to pay. They pay a higher proportion of their income to support the schools than any other citizens in the state and get less for their money.

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Equalized Property/Valuation Per Pupil

For example, Camden has a median per capita income of approximately $3,800 while the state median is $17,211. According to Mayor Melvin Primas, municipal taxes in Camden have been raised 108% in the last six years. The city has been forced to lay off police and firefighters to fund the schools.

How well teachers and students fare in urban districts will ultimately affect the health and wealth of the entire state. According to research developed by the National Education Association, high minority birthrates, immigration, a high percentage of young and old residents, and low native white birthrates, will lead to most entry-level workers in the future being non-white.

How well teachers and students fare in urban districts will ultimately affect the health and wealth of the entire state.

That research goes on to indicate that by the year 2005 most 18 to 24-year-old entry-level workers will come from the public schools of distressed urban districts. If employers' costs for training these workers become prohibitively expensive, other states and

At round table discussions urban staff members told NJEA about the obstacles to better education for their students.

third world nations will siphon jobs and industries from New Jersey. Additionally, poorly educated, low-paid workers will contribute inadequate amounts to the Social Security pool which must support an increasing number of elderly.

While New Jersey ranks second in per capita income, its cities are among the poorest in the nation. The 1980 U.S. Census lists Newark, Paterson, and Jersey City as first, fourth, and 17th in terms of residents living in poverty in cities with populations of 100,000 or more. In terms of residents living in poverty in cities with populations of 50,000 to 100,000, Camden ranks first in the nation.

Twenty-nine of New Jersey's "most impacted" urban districts contain 24.4% of the students enrolled in New Jersey public schools. They include small and large districts and districts which include poor white, as well as poor minority, children.

Of the approximately 600 districts in New Jersey, 56 school districts are designated as "urban" school districts by the State Department of Education and the State Department of Community Affairs. These designations are based on the socio-economic status of the municipality and its school district. The identifications of urban-aid municipalities are based on multiple variables:

While New Jersey ranks second in per capita income, its cities are among the poorest in the nation.

- population density.
- value of property (equalized per capita).
- equalized tax rate (taxes levied divided by the value of property).
- a measure of residents living in poverty (number of children enrolled in Aid to Dependent Children Program).

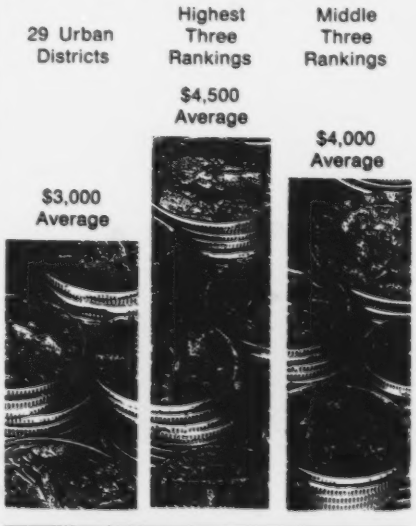
Additionally, the Department of Education considers:

- education level of males and females 25 years and older.
- occupational background of residents.
- average family income (per capita income of district).
- unemployment (percentage of unemployed males and females 16 years and older with job experience).
- degree of urbanization (percentage of urban population of the district). and
- population mobility.

Consequently, urban districts encompass such large cities as Camden, Jersey City, Orange, and Newark. But they also include municipalities which some might mistakenly typify as suburban or rural simply because of their surroundings, such as Bridgeton, Vineland, Pleasantville, and Phillipsburg.

The 29 most impacted districts contain 63.5% of the black students and 75.4% of the Hispanic students in the

Socio-economic Distribution of Per Pupil Expenditures (1984-1985)



"The Urban Problem is poverty, plain and simple. It is economic poverty, it is social poverty, it is political poverty, it is educational poverty, it is institutionalized poverty, it is the poverty of Blacks, it is the poverty of Hispanics, it is the poverty of Whites, it is the poverty of illegal aliens, it is the poverty of all races and minorities."

Dr. Leo Hilton, Coordinator of the Urban Education Program
William Paterson College

state. They also house 51.3% of New Jersey's Chapter One students, 50.6% of the state's compensatory education students, 72.4% of bilingual/English-as-a-Second-Language students, and 78.5% of pregnant students.

Gifted and talented children in urban districts aren't getting the attention they need, research shows.

Only 676 students from these 29 districts were enrolled in advanced placement classes during 1985. Compare this with the 1,640 students enrolled in advanced placement classes from Livingston, Millburn Township, Princeton Regional, and Westfield—which together contain only 14,055 (barely 1%) of New Jersey's students.

"Lack of money is the root of our evil," an urban school staff leader observed. The per pupil expenditure in New Jersey's 29 most impacted urban districts averaged approximately $3,000 in 1984-85, while school districts in the three highest rankings of socio-economic status spent an average of $4,500 on each child's education. Those of the three middle groups spent approximately $4,000.

NJEA's challenge is to put the education reform emphasis where it's most needed—on the children most at risk in our society.

Even these figures are misleading since urban districts pay more for "non-instructional" costs such as insurance, maintenance, and security.

Compare the per pupil costs with the $25,000 a year needed to house a criminal in a state correctional facility or with Princeton University's tuition costs of nearly $18,000 a year.

NJEA's challenge is to put the education reform emphasis where it's most needed—on the children most at risk in our society. This report offers a beginning.

The recommendations growing out of the Urban Challenge are a challenge to all New Jerseyans. They include actions for the State, NJEA, state lawmakers, local districts, local administrators, local associations, colleges, parents, and communities.

Some recommendations in this report call for involvement of school staff. NJEA believes that involvement should be organized in cooperation with the school employees' majority representative. Many of the proposals overlap. For example, facility problems must be addressed so that class sizes can be reduced and other programs added. Many of the recommendations will require additional money; some will not.

While this report has been divided into segments based on key issues identified in the information-gathering process, our challenge is to boost the entire educational system in a comprehensive fashion. We can do it. It will take desire. It will take money. It will take cooperation among all levels of government and all people. It will take hard work. This is only the first step. The rest is up to all of us working in education and all of us who take pride in calling New Jersey home.

"If the State is responsible for education as the Supreme Court has stated, then two things should happen. First, funding should be earmarked to cover the true costs of education. Second, the State should fully fund those costs."

Frank Napier
Paterson Superintendent of Schools

SCHOOL FINANCE

Most of the history of school finance in New Jersey is the history of how the local property tax was used to fund schools. New Jersey's strong concept of local autonomy led each community to develop its own school system and raise its own money to pay for the schools.

Of course, resources differed from town to town, but the differences were apparently not great enough to cause widespread concern. In any event, many people felt that such variations were the natural by-product of class divisions. Everyone wanted the best money could buy for their children, and often people did provide the best their level of income could provide.

But since there were different levels of income, schools provided different opportunities. So, the ideal of free public education for all children took on different forms and results in different levels of quality in different places.

The money gap between districts with great property wealth and those with relatively little property wealth grew larger, and as it did, so did the gap between the opportunities afforded young people from place to place.

In the early 1970s, the school finance system was challenged by irate taxpayers, concerned citizens, and the courts. A court case filed in 1970—Robinson vs. Cahill—contended that the State's system of funding public schools, which relied heavily on local property taxes, was unconstitutional. The suit argued that a "thorough" education was being afforded to some pupils, but denied to others.

In 1973, the State Supreme Court ruled that the State depended too much on the property tax for school funding.

This overdependence violated the concept of a thorough and efficient education system for all as required by the State Constitution, the court declared.

The Legislature was slow to act in response to the court ruling. Finally in 1975, it adopted a new funding formula. But the Legislature did not provide any new funding for the formula until the State Supreme Court closed the schools for a week in July 1976. The Legislature finally relented, passing the first income tax in the state's history.

In spite of court rulings and the formula adopted in 1975, more than half of all school costs in New Jersey are still paid through the local property tax. The State pays about 42% and the federal government about 6.4%.

The last commission to study school finance in New Jersey recommended a total State takeover of school costs. That plan never received enough support to make it through either house of the Legislature, despite the backing of Gov. William Cahill and of Thomas Kean, then the Assembly Speaker and now Governor.

The plan now in effect was backed by Gov. Brendan Byrne. But since its passage, the current formula has been fully funded only twice; the shortfalls in other years have usually led to an increase in the number of school budget defeats throughout the state.

Nowhere is the effect of state funding shortfalls felt more than in urban districts. Their tax bases are shrinking as businesses move to the suburbs, move to other states, or dissolve. Tax rates in cities are among the highest in the state, and some are about twice as high as nearby districts that offer more education programs.

Cities must provide more services than their suburban counterparts, such as paid fire and police departments, welfare and housing programs, and more. This creates even more pressure on the property tax—the well-documented problem of "municipal overburden."

As an example, Camden Mayor Melvin Primas told NJEA at the Urban Challenge hearing in Camden that out of 24,000 households in his city, fewer than 100 had family incomes

The Urban Challenge calls on everyone to help provide equal educational opportunities for every child.

of $50,000 or more. Primas pointed out that the state average per capita income is $17,211, but in Camden it is about $3,800. Yet the local tax rate is $13.53 per $100 of assessed valuation, one of the highest in the state.

Clearly, Camden taxpayers have made a commitment to their schools. Yet they cannot afford the kinds of massive building and renovation projects that would afford their youngsters a 21st century education. The State will have to do more than it is doing now.

With all this as background, NJEA believes that the State must move toward lesser reliance on the property tax. This basis for school finance is rooted in the distant past, and no longer serves us well. We can no longer afford to think about Newark's children competing against Millburn's children, or Trenton's against Princeton's, or Camden's against Haddonfield's.

If we resign ourselves to large-scale educational failure, we will all pay the price.

We can no longer accept that there will always be some winners and some losers among us, for such an attitude will inevitably make losers of us all.

We must shift our thinking. We must plan to educate all children to the best of our and their ability. The costs of welfare, prison, and all the costs associated with individuals who cannot produce in our society are much higher than the costs of top-notch education programs. We are not in an era when we can safely talk of municipality against municipality, or even state against state.

If the United States is to survive as a major power, our children must be in a position to carry on the competition with the Soviet Union, Japan, China, Korea, and other developed and developing nations. If we resign ourselves to large-scale educational failure, we will all pay the price.

Our future security as a people depends on whether we have enough productive citizens to keep our economy strong. Our Social Security system and our health care system will fail unless we have tax-paying citizens to support them, and we will not have enough such citizens without a top-notch education system in all our municipalities.

In the critical area of school finance, NJEA recommends that:

- **The State increase its funding to at least 50% of the costs of public education statewide under the current equalization aid formula, plus full funding of special education needs and transportation costs. All such funding must be on a current year basis. The State and Local Expenditure and Revenue Policy Commission is due to make its report within a year. We expect it will make a similar recommendation, or even one to have the State assume a greater percentage of school costs.**

- **The urban districts be required to bring that portion of the budget devoted to instructional expenditures to at least the state average per pupil of nonurban districts.**
- **The local districts be required at least to maintain their local contribution to education as State—or federal—funding is increased.**
- **The Governor and Legislature take immediate action to move the State away from its present over-reliance on the local property tax as quickly as possible.**
- **The federal government policy of cutting back on aid to education be immediately reversed. Federal aid programs, which targeted certain disadvantaged students, were successes. They should be expanded, not cut back. Since the federal government has the widest tax base of all on which to draw, its role in education should be a much greater one than it is now assuming. Education should be a major national priority not just in a rhetorical sense, but in the very real world of dollars and cents.**

Federal cutbacks in the school lunch program have been a particular hardship in urban districts.

"

Traditionally, urban districts employ some of the oldest and, in too many instances, antiquated facilities in New Jersey. In addition, countless bonding referendums put forth to the public are soundly defeated. Yet, these same districts remain inundated with upgraded facility requirements in the form of administrative codes which can never be realized. The logic which would allow for the passage of such codes,

INADEQUATE FACILITIES

The most visible sign of urban education is the facility in which it takes place. Many urban school buildings were "state of the art" when first built. Unfortunately, that was, in many cases, two, three, or more generations ago.

But sheer old age is not the only factor in the condition of many urban schools, since old schools well maintained are often serviceable for educational purposes.

In many urban districts, hard-pressed school boards have cut back on building maintenance to find money for instructional or other uses. As a result, many urban school buildings have deteriorated to a point where leaking roofs, crumbling plaster, rodent and insect infestation, and faulty plumbing and electrical systems are commonplace. By the State Department of Education's reckoning, it would cost some $31 million to bring the existing schools in East Orange "up to code."

"It is ironic," said NEA Executive Director Don Cameron at the NJEA Urban Challenge hearing in Jersey City, "that in this country we have changed our factories, the way we build our homes, our cars, and so forth, and yet here in the State of New Jersey we are still educating children in school facilities that are more than 100 years old and in sad state of repair."

Beyond this,

- many buildings are vandalized.
- many do not have the right facilities to offer the kind of education a student will need to prepare for the 21st century, such as science labs or rooms to accommodate computers.
- many have inadequate heating and ventilation systems. Some teachers told of teaching in temperatures fluctuating from 60 to 90 degrees—hardly a good climate for keeping students focused on their schoolwork.

In East Orange, showers in at least one school have not worked for years, so students cannot shower after physical education classes. In Union City, one school is in a converted cheese factory, obviously not designed for classroom experiences.

In Paterson, some schools' windows let little light into the classrooms. In New Brunswick, one building was once used as a prison—during the Civil War.

NJEA representatives also heard of city classrooms in which two teachers were trying to teach two different classes in the same room at the same time because there were not enough classrooms for all students.

The people of the State of New Jersey must ensure that local school districts have clean, safe, and well-equipped facilities for our students.

These anecdotes tell but a small part of the story. For urban districts often cannot afford to make the kind of renovations needed to bring the facility up to state code, and certainly cannot afford to build new facilities. In addition, some cities have no land available to build new facilities, so that if old schools were razed, students would have no place to go.

The right to a thorough and efficient education is a part of the State Constitution. This makes the provision of such a system a State responsibility. The people of the State of New Jersey must ensure that local school districts have clean, safe, and well-equipped facilities for our students.

NJEA believes that the state government should take the initiative in seeing

knowing that any districts will not be capable of complying with same, is the same logic which allowed for the passage of a test (High School Proficiency Test) which the decision-makers were definitively told would result in mass failure and an unprecedented number of pupil dropouts.

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Mark J. Finkelstein, Vice President
New Brunswick Board of Education

that all students have access to such facilities. The State should target the year 2000 as the year by which all needed repairs, renovations, and new construction should be complete.

As State Sen. Wynona Lipman put it in her testimony at the Urban Challenge hearing in Jersey City:

"If students and teachers are consistently forced to gather in substandard facilities, they will be constantly distracted from teaching and learning. How do we convince a child that he or she must apply their best efforts in an atmosphere where those responsible don't seem to be applying theirs?"

Therefore, NJEA recommends that:

- **The legislative and executive branches of state government develop and place on the ballot a statewide bond issue to raise funds to insure that needy school districts make necessary improvements, including—but not limited to—repair or expansion of existing school buildings and construction of new facilities.**
- **The Legislature and Governor create an office in the State Department of Education to plan for the capital needs of education throughout the state and implement programs to meet those needs. The duties of the office are:**
  - **a) begin with the assumption that providing a thorough and efficient education starts with providing modern facilities, including science, computer, and language labs.**
  - **b) review and upgrade the state facilities code to insure buildings that provide a professional working environment, complete student facilities, and facilities for community use.**
  - **c) develop a plan to provide those facilities in every school district in the state.**
  - **d) examine all methods of financing capital projects, such as leasing, lease-purchase, and other arrangements which have proven successful here and elsewhere.**
  - **e) require construction and/or renovation of facilities when the need for such facilities has been amply demonstrated.**
- **Various arms of state government—including the Departments of Education, Health, Human Services, Labor, and Community Affairs—develop approaches to plan construction of multi-use facilities in urban school districts. Such facilities could combine education with health and medical services, labor counseling services, and others. Such facilities would serve a wider range of citizens, making it easier to develop and maintain the political support and citizen involvement needed to ensure the success of such enterprises. Where such projects have been undertaken, as in Atlantic City and Elizabeth, they have succeeded. But these models are just that, limited in scope and scale.**
- **The State Department of Education require all urban districts to submit a plan on facilities and staffing. The plan should indicate what facilities would be needed to implement the goals embodied in this report, such as class size, and to accommodate the educational and human needs of students and staff.**
- **In undertaking any repair, renovation, or construction project, State and local officials meet with the majority representative of employees in all job categories in order to ensure that the proposed changes meet the needs of the students and staff. If the State does not gather such input, changes could be made which would not effectively meet the needs of those who will be using the facility.**
- **The State require all school buildings to include areas specifically designed as libraries, cafeterias, gymnasiums, auditoriums, etc.**

"How can you individualize for 30 students in a classroom when that classroom, in addition, has now been subdivided and a wall of closets put up in order to place 14 remedial students on the other side of that wall? With 45 students cramped in a classroom built for 20, the teacher is dared to individualize instruction!"

Eunice Kritsidimas, President
Union City Education Association

CLASS SIZE

Overcrowded classrooms and large classes are the norm in urban school districts, rather than the exception. Inadequate facilities, coupled with districts' claims of not having enough money to hire more staff, have led to class sizes which urban teachers term "unreasonable."

When participants in last December's Urban Challenge survey were asked to rank adequacy of class size, nearly half (47%) of all urban school teaching staff surveyed listed class size as "inadequate." Conversely, only 20% of nonurban teachers described their class sizes as inadequate.

Does class size really matter? The research says "yes," particularly in relation to improving pupil achievement in the primary grades.

When class sizes are smaller:

- students' achievement improves in nearly all skills and subjects, especially language, reading, mathematics, physical and mechanical skills, science, social studies, spatial relationships, and reasoning.
- the emotional climate of the learning environment is more conducive to learning.
- students volunteer more, show greater initiative, and are more eager to participate in learning activities.
- students learn to work better and become skilled in decision-making, group goal development, and conflict resolution.
- students have the advantage of a learning environment which allows them to practice skills of critical and creative thinking, such as analyzing, summarizing, abstracting, evaluating, and generalizing.
- more opportunity occurs for individual student practice and broad discussion of ideas, rather than lecture and formal presentation.
- school staff members are better able to diagnose causes of misbehavior and deal more effectively with individuals before major problems occur.
- students commit fewer aggressive acts.
- teachers are more innovative, inventing more new practices, and become more likely to introduce new practices developed by others.
- school staff members gain greater knowledge of individual students—their unique skills, interests, goals, learning styles, personal backgrounds, and rates and manners of cognitive development. and
- teachers experience a higher degree of personal satisfaction, a greater sense of achievement, and less "burnout."

At-risk students in urban areas need more individualized attention, researchers and school staff agree. Just as the bilingual student in a class of 35 can never hope to receive the necessary individual attention to master a new language, neither can the gifted and talented student's special abilities shine through and be nurtured.

Many urban children come to school academically disadvantaged. Their families are chiefly concerned with physical and economic survival. They

don't have books or newspapers at home. Many live in multi-family apartments and don't have a place to study or do homework. Many of their parents do not speak English, or have a limited education.

In addition, many teachers must cope with large numbers of special education youngsters who are mainstreamed into their classes. Unfortunately, classes are so large that those students can't get the additional individualized attention they need.

In the Urban Challenge roundtables, some teachers even reported that the number of mainstreamed youngsters placed in their classes exceeded the number of other pupils.

Over the past two decades, NJEA has developed extensive policies on class size. The most recent, adopted by the Delegate Assembly March 17, 1984, demands class size of 10 to 15 pupils because that number is regarded as educationally optimum with the exception of special types of classes.

The problem in urban schools demands immediate attention. Consequently, NJEA recommends that:

- **Legislation and/or regulatory activity limit the number of students assigned to each class in urban schools, kindergarten through 12th grade, to a maximum of 15 pupils, including mainstreamed special education or classified pupils. This goal should be accomplished by the year 2000 according to the following timetable:**
  - **a) All classes grades K-2—by September 1990.**
  - **b) All classes through 4th grade—by September 1992.**
  - **c) All classes through 8th grade—by September 1996.**
  - **d) All classes through 12th grade—by September 2000.**

Phasing in the class size requirement will enable districts to gradually expand their facilities and staffs to accommodate more classes.

- **The teacher/student ratio for pre-kindergarten classes be set at one teacher for every 10 students (1:10). This ensures the additional attention and supervision needed in preschool programs.**
- **The State place a limit on the number of students which may be mainstreamed into any regular class.**
- **The State maintain the current regulatory limits on special education class sizes to ensure special education pupils also receive a "thorough and efficient" education, except that no special education classes be allowed to exceed 15 pupils in grades K-12 or 10 pupils in pre-kindergarten.**
- **The State eliminate the current regulatory provisions which allow districts, in certain circumstances, to exceed special education class size limits through waivers.**

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Urban teachers commented that if the education system does not reach children by the second grade, learning for these students becomes increasingly difficult as time goes by.

Children in urban areas come to school burdened with problems related to their socio-economic condition. As a result, many also enter school unprepared to cope with the learning process. Parents in urban areas often don't have the resources to expose their children to the same wide range of social, cultural, language, and other experiences which those in nonurban areas take for granted. Students in urban areas lag up to two years behind in skills they need to successfully complete kindergarten, let alone first grade, teachers in urban districts report.

The schools must fill that void.

In a report to the Delegate Assembly in May 1986, the NJEA Early Childhood Education/Child Care Ad-Hoc Committee reported that 86 school districts offer some type of pre-kindergarten program. The committee noted, "Early childhood programs benefit children by influencing the attitudes and expectations of the adults with whom they interact."

> Children with preschool experiences hold more positive views of themselves, their school performance, and their potential for success in school.

Preschool programs produce a significant increase in students' intellectual functioning during the crucial years of primary grades, the committee found. Students who participate in these programs get significantly higher scores on achievement tests through the primary grades. In addition, fewer of them have problems in school, need to repeat a grade, or become assigned to remedial education.

Children with preschool experiences hold more positive views of themselves, their school performance, and their potential for success in school.

Preschool education also affects the students' parents, the committee discovered and research supports. The parents become more familiar and comfortable with the school system, become more supportive of the education process and their children's total development, and hold higher expectations of their children's success in school and later life.

Throughout the Urban Challenge roundtables and hearings, participants repeatedly emphasized the need for early childhood education to give children in urban areas the same advantage in schooling held by other students.

At the same time, the participants recognized that other students' needs must be protected. Kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs should not be housed through consolidation of other classes or developed by diverting staff or supplies from the existing school program.

NJEA recommends that:

- **Each school district be required to offer full-day kindergarten programs.**
- **Students not be automatically admitted to first grade. Teachers should determine their readiness based on a variety of factors or comprehensive assessment (not a standardized test). Some students may need an additional year of kindergarten or a transitional program before entering a first-grade classroom.**
- **Each school district be required to offer at least one year and preferably two years of pre-kindergarten education. These programs should:**
  a) be taught by persons certified by the State Board of Education.

"Those of us in urban schools know that we are not doing the same job as our suburban counterparts because we do not have the money, we do not have the programs, and we do not have the personnel to do the same job."

Sara T. Davis, President
Camdon Education Association

b) be placed under the regulatory authority of the State Department of Education, not another state agency.
c) maintain a 1:10 teacher/student ratio.
d) offer a wide variety of readiness experiences. They should neither be babysitting services nor focus on academic activities. The curriculum should be dictated by the developmental needs of the children.

- Pre-kindergarten programs be fully funded by the State. Local districts will not be able to fund the new programs themselves. The State should recognize that, in the long run, funding good preschool programs will cut down students' remedial needs.
- Pre-kindergarten programs have paid aides. Districts should make efforts to recruit individuals from the community for these posts to build parental support for and participation in the educational process. Districts should provide training programs on working with young children for these aides.

Early childhood education provides children with greater self-confidence, social skills, and readiness for school.

"Teaching in the urban environment cannot be accomplished absent some very fundamental tools. The first is a set of educational goals which recognize all the elements available to the educational process. Just as fundamental is the provision of textbooks and supplies in sufficient number for all students and teachers. If students and teachers are consistently forced to gather in substandard facilities, they will be constantly distracted from learning and teaching."

Senator Wynona M. Lipman, Essex County

IMPROVING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC SKILLS

Students in cities are inherently no different from their counterparts elsewhere. Nevertheless, the circumstances in which students in urban areas find themselves are often dramatically different from those of their nonurban counterparts.

So are their schooling experiences. Students in urban areas often are exposed to experiences integral to the educational process at a much later age than those in nonurban areas.

Many students come from homes where English is rarely or never spoken or spoken incorrectly. They must overcome these barriers in order to succeed. Research indicates that the inability to speak correctly is the deficiency of most concern to employers.

Even when they get to school, students in urban areas don't have access to the same basic instructional resources available to nonurban students.

Students and teachers in urban schools lack such basic tools as pencils and paper. At the roundtables and hearings, teachers complained of old textbooks, not enough textbooks for each student, and lack of curricular coordination among classes and schools.

Complicating the picture is the high mobility of students in urban districts. Many low-income families in urban districts move frequently; consequently, their children may attend several different schools in one year.

Passing students from grade to grade—regardless of what the students achieve and teachers recommend—harms students and society.

At one of the Urban Challenge hearings, Union City Education Association President Eunice Kristidimas told of one teacher who had 31 new students enter her class between September and February. "This is an incredible burden on a teacher. There is no way she can carry on a cohesive program."

Hindering those students further, many of their schools—for economic reasons—don't offer them a variety of programs important to a well-rounded education. Camden Education Association President Sara Davis observed that her district's elementary schools no longer have art, music, and physical education specialists—a common situation in the urban schools.

Research statistics show the mean amount of dollars spent on instructional materials in the 29 most impacted urban districts is $81.99 per pupil. The average per pupil expenditure for instructional materials in the rest of the state in 1984-85 was $117.44.

Vocational programs are few, and diversification limited, teachers reported. Noted Davis, "For many, vocational programs serve as a connection between real life and school. When that connection is broken, we lose our kids."

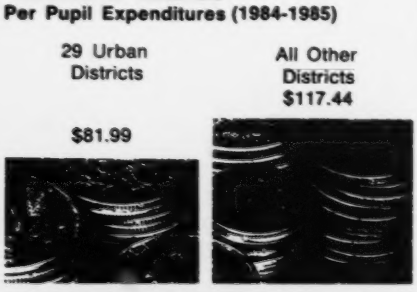
Bare-bones programs not only break that connection, they rob students of the pleasure of learning and encourage them to drop out. No wonder 44% of New Jersey's dropouts come from 29 of the state's urban areas.

Social promotion is common in the urban schools, teachers reported. Passing students from grade to grade—regardless of what the students achieve and teachers recommend—harms students and society.

Certainly no one step can help improve students' academic skills. A complete reorganization of school curricula and programs, additional staff and instructional resources, and revised funding mechanisms are needed.

Therefore, in addition to the recommendations calling for early childhood education to improve the urban students' academic skills and expanded counseling services, NJEA recommends:

Instructional Materials Per Pupil Expenditures (1984-1985)



- Urban school districts be required to develop and offer comprehensive curricula from grades K-12. These should meet all state goals as set forth in Chapter 212 and include a sound basic skills program and use of supplemental teachers, as well as enrichment programs in industrial arts, home economics, science, art, music, physical education, and career development. Many of these programs and the certified specialists to teach them have been eliminated in urban districts, especially in the primary grades. They should be restored.
- All school programs be designed to meet children's needs and encourage them to attend school. Program designs should include sufficient numbers of staff to effectively implement them.
- Emphasis be placed on providing enrichment programs in urban districts by:
  a) expanding the core curriculum beyond the "basic skills" to foster the talents, skills, and interests of students.
  b) developing and offering gifted and talented student programs (K-12), advanced placement programs, and other challenging courses, and supporting those programs with the proper resources.
- Each school building contain a school library staffed by a certified educational media specialist and supplied with adequate equipment and a variety of materials. Urban students particularly need immediate access to additional books and other materials to build on skills learned in the classroom.
- Districts provide resources and materials that are current.
- Each urban district coordinate instructional materials throughout each building and among grades.
- Each district establish a textbook selection committee comprised of teachers from throughout the district to select the coordinated materials.
- Corporations, museums, and universities provide cultural opportunities for urban children in cooperation with the school community.
- Community libraries expand their resources and availability, including offering "Bookmobiles" to provide recreational reading opportunities for students during the week, on weekends, and during the summer.
- Comprehensive assessment be used to determine student promotion from grade to grade, not reliance on any single system, process, or instrument. Comprehensive assessment is defined as:
  a) continuous and comprehensive evaluation and on-going diagnosis of student learning progress.
  b) evaluation of students to help them make wise choices and to learn the skills they need for success.
  c) student evaluation to help teachers understand student learning problems and help them prescribe ways to alleviate those problems.
  d) use of a broad range of procedures for evaluating student learning progress, student interests, and student aspirations.
  e) use of individual diagnostic instruments, carefully developed criterion-referenced tests, teacher-made tests, and appropriate norm-referenced tests.
- Educators consider educational alternatives to reach disaffected students and those who aren't ready to take on

The most important aspect of a child's education, learning to read, benefits from the attention and interest of adults.

the next grade. Districts should consider whether primary grades should be restructured to meet students' needs (e.g. transitional programs).

- Each school provide supplemental language development programs tailored to individual student needs (e.g. programs for non-English speaking students and programs that address non-standard English-speaking students). Poverty and cultural differences directly affect language development.
- In cooperation with the staff, each school district and individual schools be encouraged to implement "effective schools" programs.
- Full-time supplemental/remedial teachers be hired. Remedial class size should be limited. Class structure and scheduling should be based on individual student needs and limit the frequency with which students are pulled out of their regular classrooms.
- Districts work with higher education, business/industry, civic groups, and others to create student job opportunities and incentives for students to stay in school, as well as demonstrate correlation between academic achievement and life success.
- All county vocational schools, which serve many urban students, be required to provide full, comprehensive four-year programs.

  This would allow students who choose the vocational path to obtain their entire high school education in the same facility, instead of being transported from building to building losing both identification with their school and pride in it as well as losing valuable learning time.
- Districts provide one or more of the following at both elementary and secondary levels:
  a) transitional programs to assess the students' skills, build their knowledge, and ease their entrance into the regular classroom.
  b) transportation to the school where they started that year (within the district) so that they remain in the same school for a full year.
  c) accelerated magnet schools. and
  d) alternative schools/programs.
- The State Department of Education coordinate for districts a record of urban students who migrate. The project, similar to the Federal Migrant Computer Project, would enable schools to better serve the students by identifying their academic needs. The record would include the schools each student attended, how long the schools were attended and what grade levels, and the student's academic records.

Enrichment programs add not only to children's education but to their positive feelings about learning and school.

"It is important we get these kids off on the right foot when they start school. I want more than that. I don't want them to use crutches or to limp along in school. I want them to have a head start rather than be behind. My goal is to give them an advantage instead of being disadvantaged."

Lillian A. Augustine, Former New Jersey Teacher of the Year

INCREASING SUCCESS ON STANDARDIZED TESTS

NJEA recognizes the need for continuous and comprehensive evaluation of student progress. However, it also believes too much emphasis is placed on standardized tests.

The Association's policy, adopted by the Delegate Assembly in September 1976, states, "A broad range of procedures should be used for accomplishing evaluation purposes. Teacher judgment should play the major role in assessing student progress."

The Association opposes "reliance on any single system, process, or instrument for making decisions about student learning potential and progress." It also opposes emphasis on tests for tracking students, thus denying them educational opportunities.

Unfortunately, standardized testing has become viewed in the community as the measure of student knowledge—irrespective of what students are taught in schools.

Current state laws and regulations perpetuate the myth that standardized test scores prove students have or have not learned.

The tests have become the measure by which schools and communities judge themselves. Consequently, low test scores have served only to further stigmatize urban students.

No one should be surprised that test results in urban areas are usually lower than those in nonurban areas. Research tells us that the most accurate predictor of success on standardized tests is the family's socio-economic level.

To equate urban and nonurban districts and their students under current circumstances is ludicrous.

Consider the students' skills when they enter school, the resources denied to them, the inadequate school facilities, the bleak school environment, and their lives in general.

As one local leader pointed out in the hearings, "The students in Ho-Ho-Kus, Ridgewood, or Saddle River are not the peers of our students. Those students have a richer home life and school life than we can give our children."

The percentage of non-English speaking students is also much higher in the urban areas than nonurban areas. These students, regardless of when they entered the school or this country, are being asked to pass the same tests as English-speaking students.

Some students not only have to learn English, but need additional remedial assistance in subject fields. Unfortunately, the State doesn't provide funding for help in more than one "categorical" area. While the State has been studying this dilemma, preliminary reports indicate that its solution may be to allow some dual funding but avoid providing more money by juggling the formulas used to determine program aid or by reducing the overall amount available for remedial and bilingual education.

Educators throughout the state find the current emphasis on standardized tests—particularly the High School Proficiency Test—abhorrent and contrary to the concepts of good education, student evaluation, or school district certification.

But schools and parents in some districts have adopted ways to beat the testing system—an unfortunate political reality these days. Teach to the test. Give practice exams. Get private tutors who specialize in standardized tests to help their children. Whether educationally sound or not, those steps seem to help boost test scores.

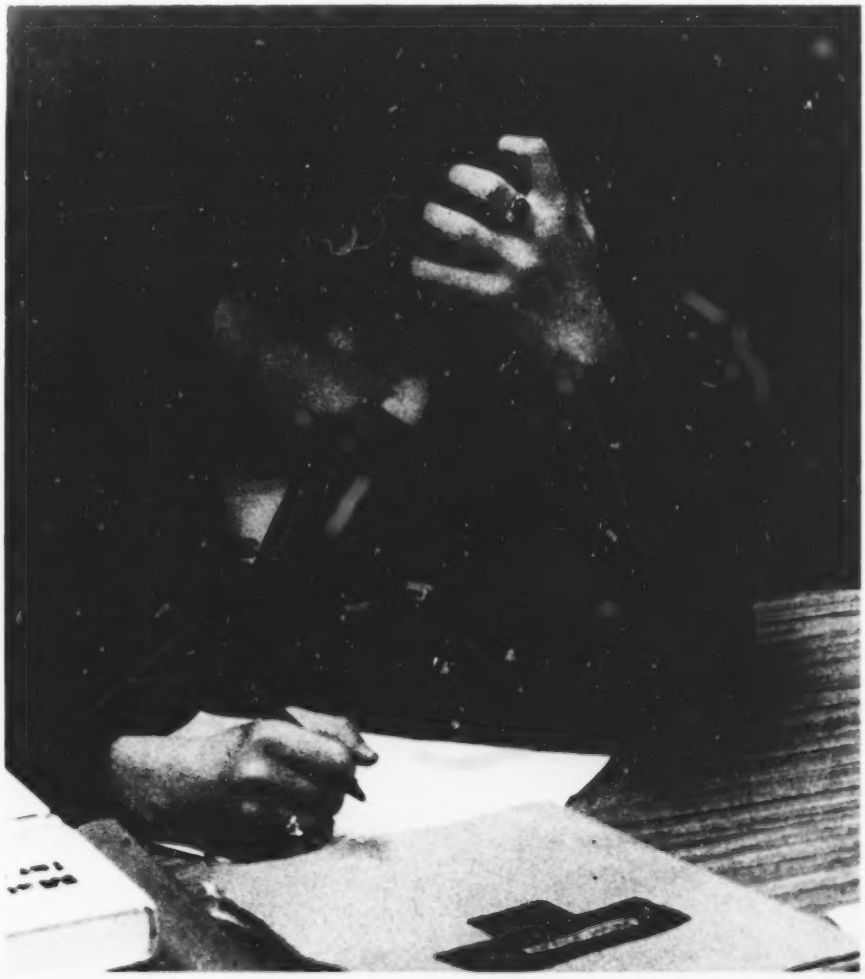
Other proposals in this report relate to factors affecting standardized test performance: instructional resources,

With a large number of non-English speaking students and children from low socio-economic levels, the higher failure rates on standardized tests in urban districts are no surprise.

early childhood education, class size, and programs to boost student achievement.

NJEA recommends that:

- **Standardized tests not be the major measure of student or district progress or success.**
- **Until standardized tests are no longer the major measure of student success, the urban schools drill students on the concepts found on standardized tests.**
- **Each school provide instruction on how to take standardized tests (e.g. test anxiety, materials to bring, and test-taking hints). This may include computer programs on test-taking.**
- **Test-making agencies, as part of their contract, make recommendations to urban districts to assist them in improving standardized test scores.**
- **Every student requiring remedial education be fully funded by the State in that program, in addition to being funded for any other categorical aid program he or she may need.**
- **Each district develop alternative assessments for non-English speaking students (K-12).**



"Such problems as student attendance, inadequate facilities, poor finances, teacher shortage and certification, drugs, single parent homes, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, a lack of support services for young people, and a lack of organized programs for use of leisure time are but a few of the problems confronting our urban school districts today."

Dr. Arnold Webster
Camden Superintendent of Schools

STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

Urban youths often see school as an unfriendly outside power trying to take control of their lives. Those students see no connection between school and life; they see no link between educational success and success in the lives they face. Thus, student absenteeism is often much higher in urban areas than in other areas.

Students who are not in school cannot learn what is being taught there. This in turn leads to failure on standardized tests and other measures of academic progress.

Teenage pregnancy has emerged as a key factor affecting student attendance. Since 40% of the girls who ultimately drop out of school do so because they are pregnant or have children, schools need to provide programs that will benefit both the girl herself and her child.

How should school districts respond to high rates of chronic absenteeism?

NJEA recommends that:

- **School districts limit essentially punishment-based attendance policies and adopt incentive-based attendance policies. The policies should be developed cooperatively in the local district by the school board, staff, administrators, and parents and should involve the business community in providing incentives to students.**
- **Specific staff be employed to investigate frequent absenteeism. Responsibilities of the job would include reporting absenteeism, evaluating the reasons for absenteeism, and counseling students and parents.**
- **Districts provide an academic program, prenatal program, and parenting program for pregnant students and day care facilities for those students' children to ensure that the students complete their education.**

Incentive-based attendance policies encourage students to stay in school and learn.

COUNSELING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

If families in the urban centers are to break from the poverty cycle, society must address the academic and social development needs of children in urban areas.

Consider this data from the National Center for Health Statistics:

- Every 31 seconds a teenager becomes pregnant.
- Roughly every two minutes a teenager gives birth.
- Every 78 seconds an adolescent attempts suicide. Every 90 minutes one succeeds.
- Every 20 minutes an adolescent is killed in an accident.
- Every 80 minutes one is murdered.
- Nearly half of all high school seniors have used an illegal drug at least once and almost 90% have used alcohol—some on a daily basis.

The statistics concerning "at-risk" youngsters in New Jersey are alarming. The N.J. Department of Health reports:

- Over 40% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 years abuse drugs or alcohol or both.
- Accidents, frequently the outcome of alcohol or drug abuse, account for nearly 55% of all deaths among this age group.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for New Jersey adolescents, and one-third of those cases are related to alcohol and drug abuse.
- In 1985, more than 11,000 children were born in New Jersey to mothers between the ages of 10 and 19. Nearly three-quarters of those young mothers were unmarried.
- An estimated 30,000 New Jersey teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant each year. Teen pregnancy rates in Cumberland County, which includes Bridgeton and Vineland—both urban-aid cities—are more than double the statewide rates.
- Mothers between age 15 and 19 are twice as likely to deliver infants who are of low birth weight, premature, or die, as well as themselves risk maternal mortality, as mothers over age 20. In addition, the incidence of child abuse and neglect is highest among low-income teenage mothers.
- Approximately 20,000 New Jersey teenagers drop out or are pushed out of high school each year, and the dropout rates soar to as high as 50% in urban areas. National Education Association figures show 29 of the state's urban districts have attempted to educate 44% of all 1985 dropouts in New Jersey schools.
- The unemployment rate among teenagers who are seeking employment is more than 20% statewide—averaging 21% for Hispanic teens and 38% for black teens. Among minority youth in urban areas, the unemployment rate runs as high as 60%.

The statistics reveal that the problems have greater and more disproportionate impact on minorities, low-income families, and specific state regions.

These students need support systems to deal with various social, economic, and cultural pressures earlier in life.

The education community has traditionally addressed these needs through the addition of special-area professionals and support personnel, such as child study teams, guidance counselors, attendance officers, and others who support the learning process.

In urban districts, where the needs are greater, fewer specialists are available and those which are, are deluged with paperwork or other duties that interfere with their time to counsel students.

Repeatedly in both the Urban Challenge roundtables and hearings, school staff, parents, and others

pleaded, "Don't wait until high school to give our children the help they need. Motivate them earlier. Offer them some ways to unburden their anxieties and concerns earlier. Give them some positive outlets."

Nearly half (48.8%) of urban professional staff members and more than a third (37.7%) of nonurban professional staff members polled last December labeled the number of guidance counselors in their schools as "inadequate." In addition, 38.3% and 35.3% of urban school staffers also termed "inadequate" the numbers of special services staff and programs for students with special needs.

Few urban schools have elementary school counselors or other staff who are equipped to help students overcome personal problems which interfere with their academic work, the roundtables and hearings showed.

Urban reform must increase the commitment of schools and community to the success of every student. Our schools are obligated to offer counseling services of a wide variety: career, academic, psychological, family counseling, and substance abuse.

To that end, NJEA recommends that:

- **Each school (K-12) in an urban setting have at least one full-time student support system (which would be comprised of guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, administrators, school nurses, and student assistance personnel) to coordinate service for the individual student.**
- **The district provide and support released time and adequate funding for training of the student support system staff members to enable them to understand the community in which the student lives and the unique characteristics of the student population.**

This would ensure an environment conducive to student success.

- **Educational support personnel and high technology resources be employed to release guidance counselors, school nurses, psychologists, social workers, and other student support professional staff from clerical tasks and eliminate unnecessary paperwork which interferes with time to counsel students.**
- **Each school have at least one full-time guidance counselor and additional counselors on a ratio of 1:100 (K-12).**
- **Additional social workers and school psychologists who are not part of the child study team be employed to deal with student problems.**
- **School districts address substance abuse problems by working with the Department of Health, local and state enforcement agencies, and other agencies to develop programs to combat student substance abuse and the sale of illegal substances.**
- **Students in urban areas have access to "student assistance programs" which provide those who have personal and family problems with immediate professional intervention and referral services. These may include emotional, financial, psychological, alcohol and drug, marital, and any other problems causing the student concern.**
- **The State provide free treatment for drug and alcohol problems for students from low income families which do not have health insurance.**

When the regular teacher is absent, learning can go on if a qualified substitute familiar with the district is available.

INADEQUATE NUMBER OF SUBSTITUTES

What happens in the majority of school districts around the state when a teacher is ill? A substitute fills in.

Urban districts, however, either try to avoid hiring substitutes or don't offer enough pay to entice individuals to serve as substitutes.

More than two-thirds of urban professional staff surveyed in December (68.6%) reported that the number of substitute teachers in their districts was "inadequate." At the roundtables and hearings, teaching staff members related how a lack of substitutes affects their work and the students.

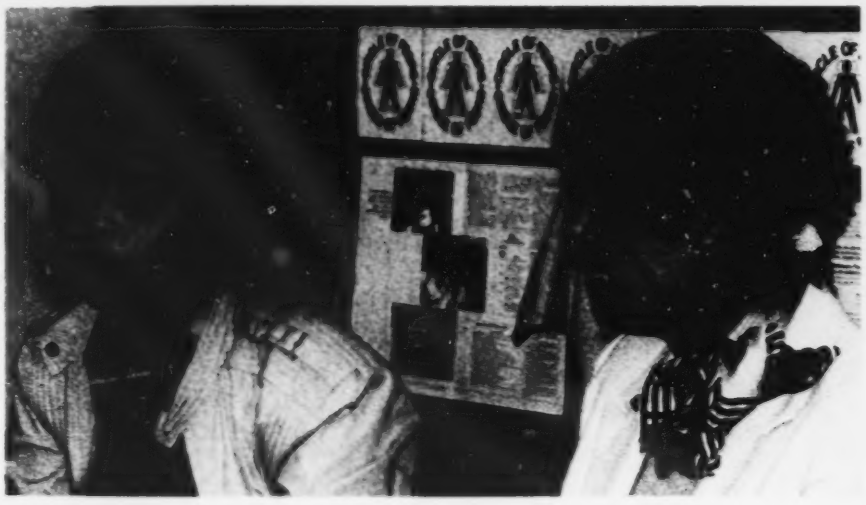
Instead of using substitutes, the urban school districts take other steps. Some simply divide up the students of absent teachers among other classes without regard to what students may be learning. The other classes become even more overcrowded, and students from all the classes suffer.

Some pull other staff—such as basic skills teachers or guidance counselors—off their jobs to substitute teach. This, in turn, disrupts those important programs.

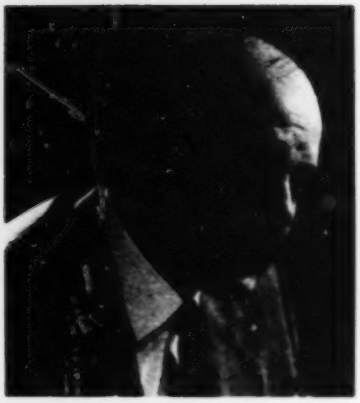
To combat this problem, NJEA recommends that:

- **Each urban district employ a permanent pool of fully certified, unassigned teachers, large enough to meet the normal absentee day-to-day needs of the district.**
- **All unassigned teachers be paid on the teacher salary scale and receive full benefits.**
- **Per diem substitutes be paid at a rate equivalent to the first step of the teacher salary guide.**
- **Districts explore ways of providing incentives for staff members with particularly good attendance records.**

To attract certified substitutes, districts must offer adequate pay.



School staff members know how vital parent-school cooperation is in helping children succeed.



"Lack of parental support and involvement clearly impedes the jobs of teachers in the classroom. Yet, parents who face the obstacles of poverty every day cannot be expected to take part in the school community without a special effort—and most special efforts cost money, money which has not been available."

Joseph A. Zemaitis, President
New Jersey School Boards Association

THE PARTNERSHIP OF SCHOOL STAFF AND PARENTS

Education is not a process that begins and ends at the schoolhouse door. Children's first teachers are their parents or guardians, the adults who care for them in their first years on earth.

Education is a joint effort. As long as we look at the education "system" as involving only education professionals and other school-based personnel, we are leaving a crucial partner out of the education equation.

Research has shown that students whose parents take an active role in their education are generally more successful than students whose parents take little or no interest in education.

When parents and educators work together, the chances of student success are greatly enhanced.

Programs to build the working relationship between parents and school staffs should be developed cooperatively by the school staff's majority representative and the school administration and board.

In addition, NJEA believes that parents must be brought into the political process by which schools are run.

At the Jersey City Urban Challenge hearing, State Assemblyman Joseph Charles said:

"The serious problem in our district is the lack of participation and meaningful involvement by the parents in what goes on in these local districts.

When parents and educators work together, the chances of student success are greatly enhanced.

"I suggest to you if we have . . . involvement . . . if we have that kind of pressure coming from the parents, we wouldn't allow the kind of problems that flow from poor management, that come from politics, that flow from undue participation (by politicians) in what should be strictly educational matters. . . . (We need) programs that will bring in, that will wake up, that will induce a sleeping and very busy parent community to become involved in the education of their children. . . . as educators and people who run the educational system, we have to try to develop programs that will bring them in, notwithstanding all of those problems they have."

Finally, former Education Commissioner Carl Marburger, now of the National Committee for Citizens in Education, spoke of a variety of successful parental involvement programs. Some of these programs are due to be tested in Camden, according to Camden School Board President Aletha Wright. Such programs should be watched carefully to gauge the response of parents and other citizens in the community.

NJEA recommends that:

- **The district and the local association develop opportunities for school staff and parents to communicate with each other on a regular basis. Such opportunities might include the use of facilitators to ease the flow of communications between parents and teachers.**
- **Local associations develop a speakers bureau and provide workshops for parents on a variety of topics (e.g. study skills, how to make parent-teacher conferences effective, Dare to Succeed, parent effectiveness training). These programs could be held at a variety of sites, including church halls, community halls, and other key places in the community.**

Bilingual classes offer children special help and offer parents a teacher who can bridge language differences.

- Local districts and associations sponsor a variety of activities to bring parents and school staff together and encourage parental participation in their children's education. These can include such programs as: Parents Awards Night, booster clubs, Adopt-a-Grandparent programs.
- Local districts and/or associations publish a flier/newsletter periodically to inform parents about events, achievements, students, and staff in each school.
- The district and/or association provide for a parent/school staff orientation at the beginning of the school year on a staggered-time basis.
- Workshops be developed as part of an ongoing effort to:
  a) increase contacts with parents.
  b) bring parents into schools to make them feel comfortable and welcome.
  c) help parents understand the importance of education for their children (for example, with a newsletter or audio-cassette centering on child-rearing practices).
  d) show parents how their participation can influence the educational process, especially the decision-making process.
  e) help parents prepare children to become better learners.
  f) help students and parents overcome language, social, and cultural barriers.
  g) offer a range of specific recreational and educational evening and weekend programs. and
  h) convince parents to become resources to develop programs (i.e. dropout prevention and recreation programs).
- NJEA help local associations and local school districts institute "outreach" programs to involve parents in the education process.
- NJEA establish training programs to help employees develop and implement such projects.
- NJEA, the State Department of Education, and other education groups work together to establish a registry of programs proven to be successful in the areas above.

"I would argue that teachers and parents are natural allies who could be helped to understand that if opportunities were provided to bring them together in circumstances other than to dispute who is responsible for the problems that the child is exhibiting, that we could see some progress here. Bring them together as co-producers, co-partners, as co-governors of the school, as co-advocates for the children's education instead of only as people who are only invited in to discuss problems."

Herbert T. Green, Director
Public Education Institute

SCHOOL STAFF/ADMINISTRATIVE TRAINING

The situations faced by teachers and administrators in urban schools are often dramatically different from those faced by their counterparts in nonurban schools. Thus, NJEA believes that special training should be offered to those considering entering the field of urban education, and for those currently in this field.

Specifically, NJEA recommends that:

- **Specialized training be provided for urban school staff, including:**
  - **a) training for administrators in improving school climate and creating professional work environments.**
  - **b) ongoing inservice training for other school staff on such topics as needs assessment, setting of expectations, and methodology to achieve them.**
- **All teacher preparation programs and all programs to prepare people for jobs in school administration include components specifically related to education in urban areas.**
- **In teacher training programs, the State provide for an endorsement in urban education which individuals could choose to seek. Courses towards the endorsement would cover a variety of topics related to urban education.**
- **To increase the supply of teachers in urban areas, the State also ensure that a variety of incentive programs (grants, loans, payment toward master's degrees) be established for those preparing specifically for urban education.**
- **The preparation of school principals include training in areas such as—but not limited to—human relations, pupil/personnel practices, management techniques, motivating employees, and leadership skills.**
- **The State encourage, provide the opportunity for, and provide funding for employed administrators to update and improve their management skills in the areas listed.**

Inservice programs should center on needs assessment, setting high expectations, and areas of professional improvement identified by the school staff.

"Give me the students, give me the materials and a decent place to work in and I will teach."

Joyce Powell, President
Vineland Education Association

MAKING SURE SCHOOLS WORK

Throughout the state, NJEA representatives heard stories of teachers with inadequate or no supplies, scheduling mishaps, maintenance work not being done or done incorrectly, and other problems.

NJEA also heard from a number of school employees that districts view the State Department of Education as an adversary rather than a collaborator. Instead of seeking help from the State, districts hide their problems in order to avoid "punishment."

Staff members also see the Department as a source of directives, paperwork, and criticism rather than support. School employees are often ignored in the monitoring process. The impact of state directives is rarely measured. Staff members argue persuasively that they are the best resource for assessing the effect of a state program, but they are the least called upon.

Tapping the knowledge and experience of staff members would benefit school districts as well. Many times, management problems such as maintenance, scheduling, and supplies could be resolved through consultations with staff members.

Districts must be given reason to believe that the State is dedicated to helping them provide students with a thorough and efficient education. Staff members must be given reason to believe that the "empowerment of the teacher" movement is not rhetoric but reality.

To change these perceptions and correct these deficiencies, NJEA recommends that:

- **Every classroom be equipped with adequate supplies and resources to ensure quality education for all children. To accomplish this, local districts should involve school staff at all levels in a comprehensive review of district budgeting, supplies, and distribution procedures.**
- **The State provide immediate assistance to districts to ensure more effective and efficient management practices whenever deficiencies are uncovered during the monitoring process. The State should provide whatever assistance is necessary, whether for additional staff or money for training of current district staff.**
- **The State Department of Education shift its focus to helping districts rather than simply regulating them. While NJEA recognizes the need to monitor districts to ensure that a thorough and efficient system of education is being provided, NJEA also believes the department has strayed too far from what should be its primary function: that of assisting and supporting local districts as they provide high-quality education.**
- **Educational support personnel and high technology resources be employed to release teachers from clerical tasks and eliminate unnecessary paperwork which interferes with time to teach.**
- **The State's data collection, analysis, and reporting practices be reviewed and improved. For instance, data on class size should accurately reflect how many students are in each class, not the ratio of students to professional staff as is currently the case.**

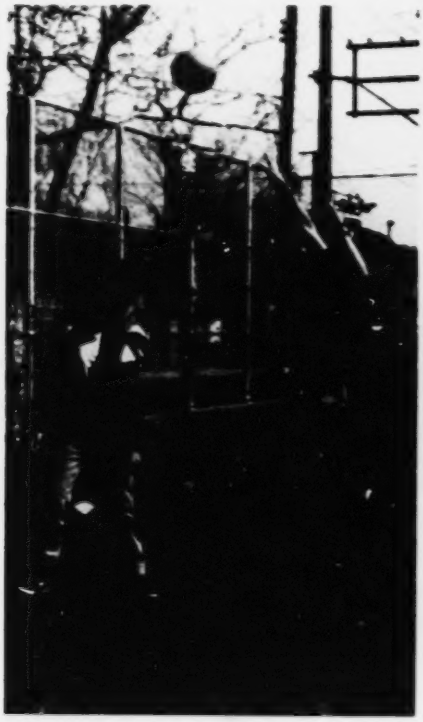
Despite inadequate supplies and materials, students in city schools work as hard as their nonurban counterparts.

The latter measure includes other professionals such as guidance counselors, librarians, nurses, child study team members, and more. The teacher/pupil ratio should include classroom teachers only, not "teaching staff members."

- Dropout statistics compiled by the State become true reflections of the number of students who drop out of school throughout the secondary school years.
- The State compile statistics on student mobility, a major factor mentioned by many school staff members. Students who move during the school year—sometimes more than once—often have difficulties adjusting to new schools and sometimes do not perform as well on standardized measures of assessment.
- State monitors of urban districts have job experience in urban schools or training in the educational environment, cultural influences, and other factors affecting education in urban schools.
- State monitors meet with staff:
  a) prior to their actual visits in order to review procedures and encourage staff participation.
  b) as part of the "exit conference" to discuss their report and recommendations.

"When there is a breakdown in the foundation at the home level, the school then has become a dumping ground for the social/cultural experience as opposed to being a partner in that process. There must be an unequivocal and unashamed challenge to parents to assume a more responsible role in partnership with teachers to educate their children."

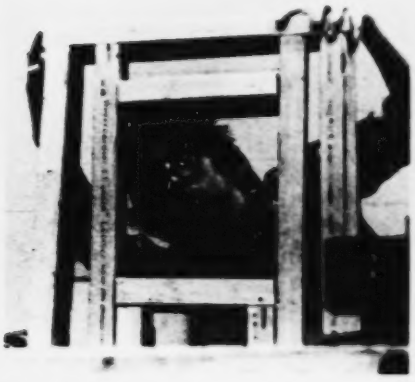
Reverend Jesse Jackson, President
National Rainbow Coalition



School playgrounds are often the only places children in urban areas have for physical recreation.

Libraries are essential to good schools, but many elementary urban schools have had to eliminate them.

Overcrowded classes deny children the individualized attention they need.



Vocational programs give many students the motivation to stay in school and learn skills for a changing job market.

Studies of preschool education programs show that children gain lifelong benefits from their early learning experiences.

"What we are doing to our urban children is not a black and white issue or a minority-majority issue, but rather a wealth vs. poverty issue. As a society, we need to redouble our efforts to teach these children. Failure to provide the needed funding to urban districts now will surely cost more in the long run by placing an extra burden on society in terms of welfare, unemployment, adult training programs, drug rehabilitation, and the prison system."

Dr. Crosby Copeland, Jr.
Trenton Superintendent of Schools

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

In many urban areas, educational decision-making is secondary to political decision-making. Job assignments, promotions and more are seen as a function of political participation.

In some cities, school employees are expected to work for the political powers-that-be in election campaigns, or risk losing their jobs.

NJEA believes that having appointed school boards contributes to the use of schools as a political instrument. In addition, local voters will have greater confidence in elected school board members as they work to improve education.

Also, some districts have a history of defeating school budgets year after year. NJEA believes that voters are expressing their frustration at the method of paying for schools, not voting against schools themselves.

Often, the districts with defeated budgets are the ones which need to spend more, not less, on schools. Budget defeats reinforce the helplessness of those trying to build the educational process.

Defeated budgets are almost always cut by local governing bodies which have little knowledge of how the budget was structured, resulting in fewer opportunities being available to students.

State authorities and NJEA members alike realize that political interference in school operations hampers the effectiveness of the school system. NJEA does not believe that taking tenure rights away from certain groups of employees will improve matters.

The stability that accrues in a system where tenure rights are protected is of great benefit to urban school systems. Nowhere are tenure rights more important than in cities, where wholesale firings would be the order of the day if tenure were abolished and replaced with the old system of political patronage.

Therefore, NJEA recommends that:

- **All local boards of education be elected and be subject to recall.**
- **Those elected to the board ensure that administrators and other school employees are appointed and placed in positions based on qualifications. Nepotism, political affiliation, or favoritism should not play a part in employment or managerial decisions.**
- **Voting on school budgets by the general public be eliminated.**
- **The practice of state intervention be pursued as district needs dictate and not be restricted to wholesale takeover as a desperation measure at the end of the monitoring process.**
- **Tenure rights and all employment rights of school employees continue to be protected.**

Decisions about schools must be based on what's best for the educational program, not on political interests.

> Urban education in New Jersey as well as across this nation is mired in deeply rooted external and internal conflicts. Political interference, systemic management deficiencies, low staff morale, inadequate community support and parental involvement, and insufficient funding all characterize too many of our urban schools and lie at the heart of this crisis. Together they create a structure for failure which no amount of programmatic response can adequately alleviate.
>
> *Elena Scambio, Essex County Superintendent of Schools*

> Urban schools need money. They need resources. They need decent buildings and public recognition for the job they are doing. No institution in our society is working harder to realize the promise of our Constitution and our commitment to justice and equity than are the urban schools. Let those who condemn them make half the effort and we would be a new society tomorrow.

Dr. James D. Baines
William Paterson College

FULFILLING THE URBAN CHALLENGE

The Urban Challenge report is not, and was not intended to be, a theoretical treatise or an academic exercise. It represents the thoughts and feelings of those who work each day to provide our children in urban environments the knowledge and skills they will need to survive and excel as adults.

It is, in part, an unburdening of years of frustration at the seemingly endless, often thankless task they have undertaken.

At the same time, the Urban Challenge report contained in these pages is an expression of hope and optimism. The task can be accomplished. Our children can learn. Our cities can be rebuilt. All that can be done if we have the will to make it happen.

Some may see recommendations put forward here that have been spoken of for years. Some may see solutions to problems that have been attempted in pilot projects and isolated situations. There was no attempt made in the Urban Challenge to be innovative for the sake of innovation.

The attempt was made to compile the best thinking of the people actually working in urban schools and combine that with research conducted by NJEA and NEA along with other groups.

Into the mix went projects and programs currently underway in urban schools in New Jersey and across the country, and the testimony of experts in the fields of urban education and urban problems. Commentary was also sought from local and state political leaders as well as concerned lay citizens working city by city to make life better for their children.

NJEA's goal remains putting the education reform emphasis where it's most needed—on the children most at risk in our society.

NJEA's goal remains challenging all New Jerseyans to recognize the tremendous needs our children have and then to shoulder the responsibility we all share to make our schools—and our children's lives—better.

NJEA's goal remains challenging our governmental leaders and the State's educational leaders to summon the political courage required to do what they know must be done legislatively and administratively to save our children.

NJEA's goal remains mobilizing its own resources to continue the work this report only begins. That means work at the state and national levels, in the halls of government, and on the campaign trail. It means programs, projects, and training pursued with one purpose, the improvement of our children's education.

It also means work in every urban school district carried out by NJEA members who know what happens in their schools, and classrooms, and communities is what will make the difference to the children.

NJEA's goal remains challenging the citizens of our urban communities to keep working to build better communities, better homes, and better lives for themselves and for their children.

NJEA's challenge remains improving the entire educational system in a comprehensive fashion; attacking the disease rather than isolated symptoms.

Fulfilling the Urban Challenge will take money. It will take hard work. It will take courage. It will take sacrifice. It will take cooperation among all levels of our population and among all levels of our state's leadership and government.

Fulfilling the Urban Challenge can be done. It must be done. The Urban Challenge is everyone's challenge.

This report offers a beginning.

THE URBAN CHALLENGE

It is with pride and hope that we share NJEA's Urban Challenge report with you.

Adopted as the policy of NJEA by our Delegate Assembly on May 16, 1987, the Urban Challenge report truly represents the thoughts and feelings of those who work each day to provide our children with the knowledge and skills they will need to survive and excel as adults.

The recommendations cover the key aspects of educational improvement that must occur if our urban schools are to achieve the level of excellence they once enjoyed . . . the level of excellence our students need and deserve.

Our efforts are dedicated to the one hope for the future—the children of New Jersey.

Dennis Giordano
President

Dennis Testa
Secretary-Treasurer

Betty Kraemer
Vice President

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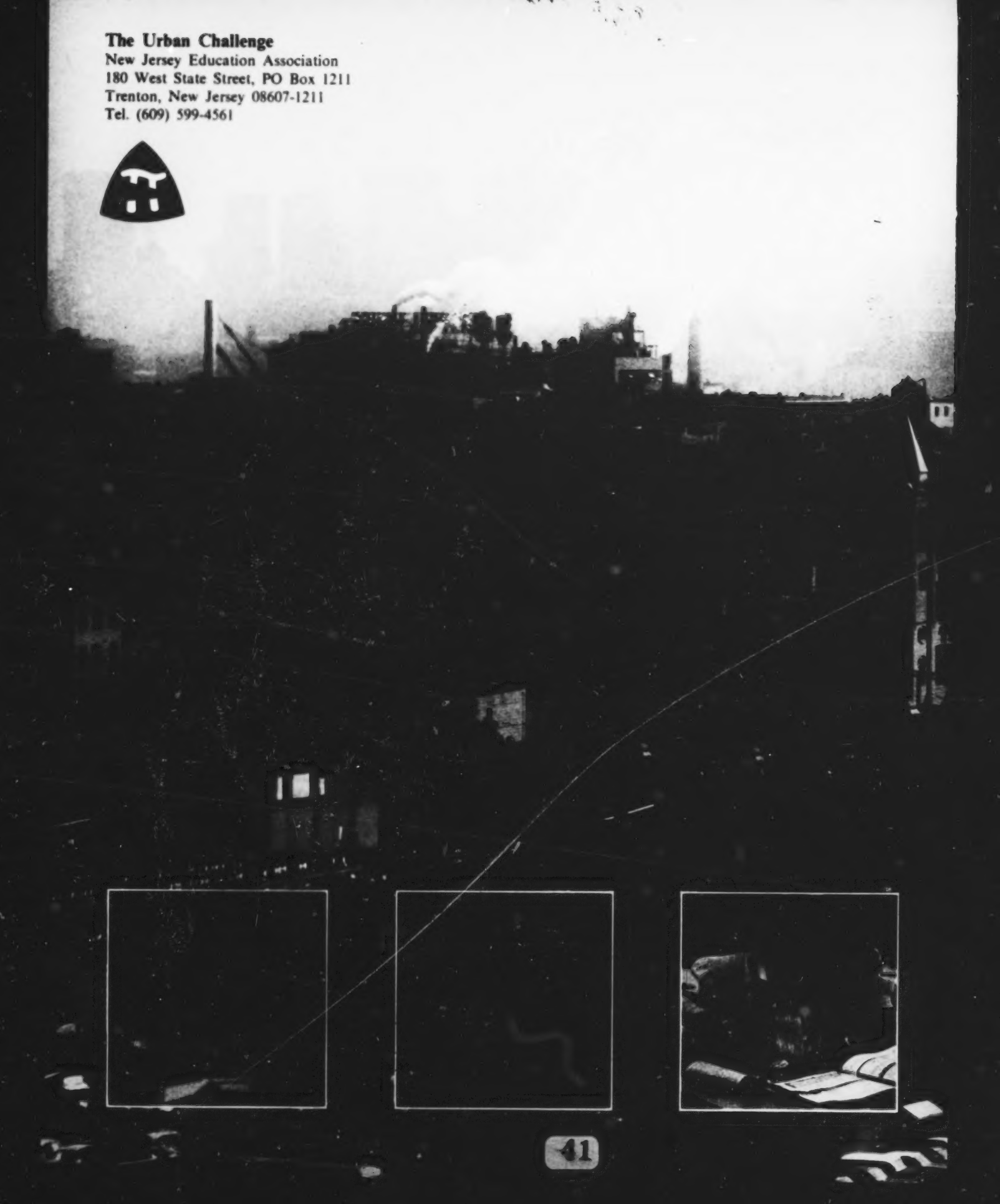
The Urban Challenge
New Jersey Education Association
180 West State Street, PO Box 1211
Trenton, New Jersey 08607-1211
Tel. (609) 599-4561



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